Feef and Meemuh

By Booth Tarkington

Illustrated by E. Hitchcock

SUPERCILIOUSNESS is not so safe after all, because a person who forms the habit of wearing it may some day find that his lower lip has become permanently projected beyond the upper so that he can't get it back and must go through life looking like the King of Spain. This was to be the culmination of Florence Atwater's still plastic profile, as foretold by her mother, if Florence didn't change her way of thinking; and upon Florence's observing dreamily that the King of Spain was an awf'ly han'some man, Mrs. Atwater retorted: "But not for a girl!" She meant, of course, that a girl who looked too much like the King of Spain would not be handsome, and her daughter understood without difficulty; nevertheless, with an air of happy refutation, made the gratuitous statement:

"Why, he's my very ideal! I'd marry him to-morrow!"

Mrs. Atwater paused in her darning, letting the stocking droop in her work basket. "Not at barely thirteen, would you?" she said. "It seems to me you're just a shade too young to be marrying a man who's already got a wife and several children. Where did you pick up that 'I'd - marry - him - to-morrow,' Florence?"

"Oh, I hear that everywhere!" returned the damsel lightly. "Everybody says things like that. I heard Aunt Julia say it. I heard Kitty Silver say it."

"About the King of Spain?" Mrs. Atwater inquired.

"I don't know who they were saying it about," said Florence, "but they were saying it. I don't mean they were saying it together; I heard one say it one time and the other say it some other time. I think Kitty Silver was saying it about some colored man. She proba'ly wouldn't want to marry any white man; at least I don't expect she would. She's been married to a couple of colored men, anyhow; and she was married twice to one of 'em, and the other one died in between. Anyhow, that's what she told me. She weighed over 200 pounds, the first time she was married, and she weighed over 270 the last time she was married to the first one over again, but she says she don't know how much she weighed when she was married to the one in between. She says she never got weighed all the time she was married to that one. Did Kitty Silver ever tell you that, mamma?"

"Yes, often!" Mrs. Atwater replied. "I don't think it's very entertaining; and that's not what we were talking about. I was trying to tell you"——

"I know," Florence interrupted. "You said I'd get my face so's my underlip wouldn't go back where it ought to if I didn't quit turning up my nose at people I think are beneath contempt. I guess the best thing would be just to feel that way without letting on by my face, and then there wouldn't be any danger."

"No," said Mrs. Atwater. "That's not what I meant. You mustn't let your feelings get their nose turned up, or their underlip out, either, because feelings can grow warped just as well as"——

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BUT her remarks had already caused her daughter to follow a trail of thought somewhat divergent from the main road along which the mother feebly struggled to progress. "Mamma," said Florence brightly, "do you b'lieve it's true if a person swallows an apple seed or a lemon seed or a watermelon seed, f'r instance, do you think they'd have a tree grow up inside of 'em? Henry Rooter said it would, yesterday."

Mrs. Atwater looked a little anxious. "Did you swallow some sort of seed?" she asked.

"It was only some grape seeds, mamma; and you needn't think I got to take anything for it, because I've swallowed a million, I guess, in my time, and"——

"In your time?" her mother repeated, seemingly mystified.

"Yes, and so have you and papa," Florence went on. "I've seen you when you ate grapes. Henry said maybe not about grapes, because I told him all what I've just been telling you, mamma, how I must of swallowed a million, in my time, and so said grape seeds weren't big enough to get a good holt, but he said if I was to swallow an apple seed a tree would start up, and in a year or two, maybe, it would grow up so't I couldn't get my mouth shut on account the branches and leaves."

"Nonsense!"

"Henry said another boy told him, but he said you could ask anybody and they'd tell you it was true. Henry said this boy that told him's uncle died of it when he was eleven years old, and this boy knew a grown woman that was pretty sick from it right now. I expect Henry wasn't telling such a falsehood about it, mamma, but proba'ly this boy did, because I didn't believe it for a minute! Henry Rooter says he never told a lie yet, in his life, mamma and he wasn't going to begin now." She paused for a moment, then added thoughtfully: "I don't believe a word he says!"

She continued to meditate disapprovingly upon Henry Rooter. "Old thing!" she murmured gloomily, for she had indeed known moments of apprehension concerning the grape seeds. "Nothing but an old thing—what he is!" she repeated inaudibly.

"Florence," said Mrs. Atwater, "don't you want to slip over to grandpa's and ask Aunt Julia if she has a No. 3 darning needle? And don't forget not to look supercilious when you meet people on the way. Even your grandfather has been noticing it, and was the one that spoke of it to me. Don't forget!"

"Yes'm." And Florence went out of the house somewhat moodily. Afternoon sunshine and the sight of the shady street restored her, however; and she opened the picket gate and stepped forth upon the sidewalk with a fair renewal of her chosen manner toward the public, though just at that moment no public was in sight. Miss Atwater's underlip resumed the position for which her mother had predicted that regal though Spanish fixity, and her eyebrows and nose were all three perceptibly elevated. At the same time her eyelids were half lowered, and the corners of her mouth somewhat deepened, facial maneuvers which added a veiled mirth to the superciliousness already accomplished, so that this well dressed child strolled down the shady sidewalk wearing an expression not merely of highbred contempt but also mysteriously derisory. It was an expression which should have put a pedestrian (no matter of what fancied status) in his place, and it seems a pity that the long street before her appeared to be empty of all human life. No one even so much as glanced from a window of any of the comfortable houses, set back at the end of their "front walks" and basking amid pleasant lawns—for, naturally, this was the "best residence" street" in the town, since all the Atwaters and other relatives of Florence dwelt thereon.

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HOWEVER, an old gentleman turned a corner before Florence had gone a hundred yards, and, as he turned in her direction, it became certain that they would meet. He was a stranger—that is, he was unknown to Florence—and he was well dressed, a person who might well be noticed; while his appearance of age (proba'ly at least forty or sixty or something) indicated that he might have sense enough to be interested in other interesting persons.

An extraordinary change took place upon the surface of Florence Atwater: all superciliousness and derision of the world vanished; her eyes opened wide, and into them came a look at once far away and intently fixed. Also, a frown of concentration appeared upon her brow, and her lips moved silently, but with rapidity, as if she repeated to herself something of almost tragic import. Florence had recently read a newspaper account of the earlier struggles of a now successful actress; how, as a girl, this unmistakable genius went about the streets repeating the lines of various rôles to herself—constantly rehearsing, in fact, upon the public thoroughfares, so carried away was she by her intended profession and so determined to be famous. This was what Florence was doing now, except that she was not rehearsing any rôle in particular, and the words formed by her lips were neither sequential nor consequential, being, in fact, the following: "Oh, the darkness . . . never, never, never! . . . you couldn't . . . he shouldn't . . . Ah, mother! . . . Where the river swings so slowly . . . Ah, no!" Nevertheless, she was doing all she could for the elderly stranger, and as they came closer, encountered, and passed on, she had the definite impression that he did indeed take her to be a struggling young actress who would some day be famous—and then he might see her on a night of triumph and recognize her as the girl he had passed on the street, that day, so long ago. . . . But by this time the episode was concluded; the footsteps of him for whom she was performing had become inaudible behind her, and she began to forget him; which was as well, since he went out of her life then, and the two never met again. The struggling young actress disappeared and the previous derisory superciliousness was resumed. It became notably emphasized as a boy of her own age emerged to her view from the "side yard" of a house at the next corner.

The boy caught sight of Florence in plenty of time to observe this striking change in her manner, all too obviously produced by her sensations at sight of himself; and after staring at her for a moment he allowed his own expression to become one of pain. Then he slowly swung about, as if to return into that side yard obscurity whence he had come; making clear by this pantomime that he reciprocally found the sight of her insufferable. In truth, he did; for he was not only her neighbor but her first cousin as well, and a short month older, though taller than she—tall beyond his years, taller than need be, in fact, and still in knickerbockers. However, his parents may not have been mistaken in the matter, for it was plain that he looked as well in knickerbockers as he could have looked in anything. He had no visible beauty, though of course it was possible to hope for him that by the time he reached manhood he would be more tightly put together than he seemed at present; and indeed he himself appeared to have some consciousness of insecurity in the fastenings of his members, for it was his habit (observable even now as he turned to avoid Miss Atwater) to haul at himself, to sag and hitch about inside his clothes, and to corkscrew his neck against the swathing of his collar. And yet there were times, as the most affectionate of his aunts had remarked, when, for a moment or so, he appeared to be almost knowing; and, seeing him walking before her, she had almost taken him for a young man; and sometimes he said something in a settled kind of a way that was almost adult. This fondest aunt went on to add, however, that of course the next minute after one of these fleeting spells he was sure to be overtaken by his more accustomed moods, and his eye would again glow with the fundamental aimlessness natural to his years. In brief, he was at the age when he spent most of his time changing his mind about things, or, rather, when his mind spent most of its time changing him about things—and this was what happened now.

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AFTER turning his back on the hateful sight well known to him as his cousin Florence at her freshest, he turned again, came forth from his place of residence, and, joining her upon the pavement, walked beside her, accompanying her without greeting or inquiry. His expression of pain, indicating her insufferableness, had not abated; neither had her air of being a duchess looking at bugs.

"You are a pretty one!" he said; but his intention was perceived to be far indeed from his words.

"Oh, am I, Mister Atwater?" Florence responded. "I'm awf'ly glad you think so!"

"I mean about what Henry Rooter said," her cousin explained. "Henry Rooter told me he made you believe you were goin' to have a grapevine climbin' up inside of you because you ate some grapes with the seeds in 'em. He says he scared you into fits, and you thought you'd have to get a carpenter to build a little arbor so you could swallow it for the grapevine to grow on. He says"——

Florence had become an angry pink. "That little Henry Rooter is the worst falsehooder in this town; and I never believed a word he said in his life! Anyway, what affairs is it of yours, I'd like you to please be so kind and obliging for to tell me, Mister Herbert Illingsworth Atwater, Ecksquire?"

"What affairs?" Herbert echoed, in plaintive satire. "What affairs is it of mine? That's just the trouble! It's got to be my affairs just because you got to be my first cousin. My goodness, I didn't have anything to do with you being my cousin, did I?"

"Well, I didn't!" Florence interposed hotly.

"That's neither here nor there," said Herbert. "What I want to know is, how long you goin' to keep this up?"

"Keep what up?"

"I mean, how do you think I like havin' somebody like Henry Rooter comin' round tellin' what they made a cousin of mine believe, and over thirteen years old, goin' on fourteen ever since about a month ago almost"——

Florence shouted, "Oh, for goodness' sakes!" then moderated the volume but not the intensity of her tone. "Kindly reply to this. Whoever asked you to come and take a walk with me to-day?"

Herbert protested to heaven. "Why, I wouldn't take a walk with you, of my own free will, unless I had to be killed. I wouldn't take a walk with you if every policeman in this town tried to make me. I wouldn't take a walk with you if they brought a million horses and"——

"I wouldn't take a walk with you," Florence interrupted, "if they brought a million million horses—and cows—and camels"——

Herbert looked incredulous. "Oh, no, you wouldn't—not if I could help it!"

By this time Florence had regained her derisive superciliousness. "There's a few things you could help," she said; and the incautious Herbert challenged her with the inquiry she desired.

"What could I help?"

"I should think you could help bumpin' into me every second when I'm takin' a walk on my own affairs, and walk along on your own side of the sidewalk, anyway, and not be so awkward a person has to keep trippin' over you about every time I try to take a step!"

Herbert withdrew temporarily to his own side of the sidewalk. "Who?" he demanded hotly. "Who says I'm awkward?"

"All the fam'ly," Miss Atwater returned, with a slight, infuriating laugh. "You bump into 'em sideways and keep getting half in front of 'em, whenever they try to take a step, and then when it looks as if they'd pretty near fall over you"——

"You look here!"

"And besides all that," Florence went on, undisturbed, "why, you generally keep kind of snorting, or something, and then making all those noises in your neck. You were doin' it at grandpa's last Sunday dinner, because every time there wasn't anybody talking, why, everybody could hear you plain as everything, and you ought to've seen grandpa look at you! He looked as if you'd set him crazy if you didn't quit that chuttering and cluckling!"

Herbert's expression partook of a furious astonishment. "I don't any such a thing!" he burst out. "I guess I wouldn't talk much about last Sunday's dinner, if I was you, neither. Who got caught lickin' the ice cream freezer spoon out on the back porch, if you please? Yes, and I guess you better study a little grammar, while you're about it. There's no such words in the English language as 'cluckling' and 'chuttering.'"

"I don't care what language they're in," the stubborn Florence insisted. "It's what you do, just the same—cluckling and chuttering!"

Herbert's manners went to pieces. "Oh, dry up!" he bellowed.

"That's a nice way to talk! So gentlemanly"——

"Well, you try and be a lady, then!"

"Try!" Florence echoed. "Well, after that, I'll just politely thank you to dry up yourself, Mister Herbert Atwater!"

Herbert's eyes gleamed with fierce triumph. "You couldn't if you did try! You couldn't if you tried till you were a million years old! You couldn't if"——

"I said 'Dry up!'" shouted Florence.

At this Herbert became moody. "Oh, pfuff!" he said; and for some moments walked in silence. Then he asked: "Where you goin', Florence?"

The damsel paused at a picket gate, opening upon a broad lawn which was evenly bisected by a wide brick wall leading to the ample frame porch of a fat and honest old brick house. "Right here to grandpa's, since you haf to know!" she said. "And thank you for your delightful comp'ny which I never asked for, if you care to hear the truth for once in your life!"

Herbert meditated. "Well, I got nothin' else to do, as I know of," he said. "Let's go around to the back door so's to see if Kitty Silver's got anything."

Then, not amiably, but at least inconsequently, they passed inside the gate and went up the brick walk together. Their brows were fairly unclouded; no special marks of conflict remained. For this was but their customary way of meeting.

They followed a branch of the brick walk and passed round the south side of the house, where a small orchard of apple trees showed generous promise; hundreds of little round apples among the crisp leaves glancing the high lights to and fro on their infantile green cheeks, as a breeze hopped through the yard, while the shade beneath was filled with sunshine flecks that moved coquettishly. This shifting of orange light and blue was laid like a fanciful plaid over the lattice and over the wide, slightly sagging steps of the elderly back porch; and here, taking her ease upon these steps, sat a middle-aged colored woman of continental proportions. Beyond all contest, she was the largest colored woman in that town, though her height was not unusual and she had rather a small face. That is to say, as Florence had once explained to her, the face was small but the other parts of her head were terribly wide. Beside her was a circular brown basket, of a weave suggesting arts-and-crafts; it was made with a cover, and there was a bow of brown silk upon the little handle at the apex of the cover.

"What have you been up to to-day, Kitty Silver?" Herbert asked genially. "Anything special?" For this was the sequel to his "so's we can see if Kitty Silver's got anything." But Mrs. Silver discouraged him.

"No, I ain't," she replied. "I ain't, an' I ain't goin' to."

"I thought you pretty near always made cookies on Tuesday," he said.

"Well, I ain't this Tuesday," said Kitty Silver. "I ain't, an' I ain't goin' to. You might dess well g'on home ri' now. I ain't, an' I ain't goin' to."

THE lid of the basket lifted by the slim hand of Miss Atwater, rose to disclose two cats of an age slightly beyond kittenhood

Docility was no element of Mrs. Silver's present mood, and Herbert's hopeful eyes became blank as his gaze wandered from her head to the brown basket beside her. The basket did not interest him; the ribbon gave it a quality which at once almost excluded it from his consciousness. On the contrary, the ribbon had drawn Florence's attention to it, and she stared at the basket eagerly.

"What you got there, Kitty Silver?" she asked.

"What I got where?"

"In that basket."

"Nemmine what I got 'n 'at basket," said Mrs. Silver crossly, but added inconsistently: "I dess wish somebody ast me what I got 'n 'st basket! I ain't no cat washwoman fer nobody!"

"Cats!" Florence cried. "Are there cats in that basket, Kitty Silver? Let's look at 'em!"

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THE lid of the basket, lifted by the eager, slim hand of Miss Atwater, rose to disclose two cats of an age slightly beyond kittenhood. They were of a breed unfamiliar to Florence, and she did not obey the impulse which usually makes a girl seize upon any young cat at sight and caress it. Instead, she looked at them with some perplexity, and after a moment inquired: "Are they really cats, Kitty Silver, do you b'lieve?"

"Cats whut she done tole me," the colored woman replied. "You betta shet 'at lid down, you don' wan' 'em run away, 'cause they ain't yoosta livin' 'n 'at basket yet; an' no matter whut kine o' cats they is or they isn't, one thing true—they wile cats!"

"But what makes their hair so long?" Florence asked, still keeping the lid lifted. "I never saw cats with hair a couple inches long like that."

"Miss Julia say they Berjum cats."

"What?"

"I ain't tellin' you no mo'n she tole me. You aunt say they Berjum cats."

"Persian," said Herbert. "That's nothing. I've seen plenty Persian cats. My goodness, I should think you'd have seen a Persian cat at your age. Thirteen goin' on fourteen!"

Florence frowned. "Well, I have seen Persian cats plenty times, I guess," she said. "I thought Persian cats were white, and these are kind of gray."

At this Kitty Silver permitted herself to utter an embittered laugh. "You wrong!" she said. "These cats, they white; yes'm!"

"Why, they aren't either! They're as gray as"——

"No'm," said Mrs. Silver. "They plum spang white, else you aunt Julia gone out of her mind; me or her, one. I say: 'Miss Julia, them gray cats.' 'White,' she say. 'Them two cats is white cats,' she say. 'Them cats been crated,' she say. They been livin' in a crate on a dirty express train fer th'ee fo' days,' she say. 'Them cats gone got all smoke up thataway,' she say. 'No'm, Miss Julia,' I say. 'No'm, Miss Julia, they ain' no train,' I say, 'they ain' no train kin take an' smoke two white cats up like these cats, so's they hair is gray clean plum up to they hide.' . . . You betta put that lid down, I tell you!"

Florence complied, just in time to prevent one of the young cats from leaping out of the basket, but she did not fasten the oover. Instead she knelt, and, allowing a space of half an inch to intervene between the basket and the rim of the cover, peered within at the occupants. "I believe the one to this side's a he," she said. "It's got greenisher eyes than the other one; that's the way you can always tell. I b'lieve this one's a he and the other one's a she."

"I ain't stedyin' about no he's an' she's!"

"What did Aunt Julia say?" Florence asked.

"Whut you Aunt Julia say when?"

"When you told her these were gray cats and not white cats?"

"She told me take an' clean 'em," said Kitty Silver. "She say, she say she want 'em clean' up spick an' spang befo' Mista Sammerses git here 's even' to call an' see 'em." And she added morosely: "I ain't no cat washwoman!"

"She wants you to bathe 'em?" Florence inquired, but Kitty Silver did not reply directly. She breathed audibly, with a strange effect upon vastly outward portions of her, and then gave an incomparably dulcet imitation of her own voice, as she interpreted her use of it in the recent interview.

"'Miss Julia, ma'am,' I say—'Miss Julia, ma'am, my bizniss cookin' vittles,' I say. 'Miss Julia, ma'am,' I tole her—'Miss Julia, ma'am, I cook fer you pa, an' I cook fer you fam'ly year in, year out, an' I hope an' pursue, whiles some might make complaint. I take whatever I find, an' I leave whatever I find. No'm, Miss Julia, ma'am,' I say—'no'm, Miss Julia, ma'am. I ain't no cat washwoman!'"

"What did Aunt Julia say then?"

"She say, she say: 'Di'n' I tell you take them cats downstairs an' clean 'em?' she say. I ain't nobody's cat washwoman!"

Florence was becoming more and more interested. "I should think that would be kind of fun," she said—"to be a cat washwoman. I wouldn't mind that at all; I'd kind of like it. I expect if you was a cat washwoman, Kitty Silver, you'd be pretty near the only one there was in the world. I wonder if they do have 'em any place—cat washwomen."

"I don't know if they got 'em some place," said Kitty Silver, "an' I don' know if they ain't got 'em no place; but I bet if they got 'em any place, it's some place else from here!"

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FLORENCE looked thoughtful. "Who was it you said is going to call this evening and see 'em?"

"Mista Sammerses."

"She means Newland Sanders," Herbert explained. "Aunt Julia says all her callers that ever came to this house in their lives, Kitty Silver never got the name right of a single one of 'em!"

"Newland Sanders is the one with the little mustache," Florence explained. "Is that the one you mean by 'Sammerses,' Kitty Silver?"

"Mista Sammerses who you Aunt Julia tole me," Mrs. Silver responded stubbornly. "He ain't got no mustache what you kin look at—dess some blackish what don' reach out mo'n halfway todes the bofe en's of his mouf."

"Well," said Florence, "was Mr. Sanders the one gave her these Persian cats, Kitty Silver?"

"I reckon." Mrs. Silver breathed audibly again, and her expression was strongly resentful. "When she go fer a walk 'long with any them callers she stop an' make a big fuss over any lil ole dog or cat an' I don' know what all, an' after they done buy her all the candy from all the candy sto's in the livin' worl', an' all the flowers from all the greenhouses they is, it's a wonder some of 'em ain't sen' her a mule fer a present, 'cause seem like to me they done sen' her mos' every kine of animal they is! Firs' come Airydale dog you grampaw tuck an' give away to the milkman; 'n'en come two mo' pups; I don' know what they is, 'cause they bofe had dess sense enough to run away after you grampaw try to learn 'em how much he ain't like no pups; an' nex' them two canaries hangin' in the dinin' room now, an' nex'—di'n I holler so's they could ahear me downtown? Di'n I walk in my kitchen one mawnin' right slam in the face of a ole warty alligatuh three foot long lookin' at me over the aidge o' my kitchen sink?"

"It was Mr. Clairdyce gave her that," said Florence. "He'd been to Florida; but she didn't care for it very much, and she didn't make any fuss at all when grandpa got the florist to take it. Grandpa hates animals."

"He don' hate 'em no wuss'n whut I do," said Kitty Silver. "An' he ain't got to ketch 'em lookin' at him outen of his kitchen sink—an' he ain't fixin' to be no cat washwoman neither!"

"Are you fixing to?" Florence asked quickly. "You don't need to do it, Kitty Silver. I'd be willing to, and so'd Herbert. Wouldn't you, Herbert?"

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HERBERT deliberated within himself, then brightened. "I'd just as soon," he said. "I'd kind of like to see how a cat acts when it's bathed."

"I think it would be speshly inter'sting to wash Persian cats," Florence added with increasing enthusiasm. "I never wash a cat in my life."

"Neither have I," said Herbert. "I always thought they did it themselves."

Kitty Silver sniffed. "Ain't I says so to you Aunt Julia? She done tole me, 'No,' she say. She say, she say Berjum cats ain't wash theyself; they got to take an' git somebody else to wash 'em!"

"If we're goin' to bathe 'em," said Florence, "we ought to know their names, so's we can tell 'em to hold still and everything. You can't do much with an animal unless you know their name. Did Aunt Julia tell these cats' names, Kitty Silver?"

"She say they name Feef an' Meemuh. Yes'm! Feef an' Meemuh! Whut kine o' name is Feef an' Meemuh fer cat name!"

"Oh, those are lovely names!" Florence assured her, and, turning to Herbert, explained: "She means Fifi and Mimi."

"Feef an' Meemuh," said Kitty Silver. "Them name don' suit me an' them long-hair cats don' suit me neither." Here she lifted the cover of the basket a little, and gazed nervously within. "Look at there!" she said. "Look at a way they lookin' at me! Don't you look at me thataway, you Feef an' Meemuh!" She clapped the lid down and fastened it. "Fixin' to jump out an' grab me, was you!"

"I guess, maybe," said Florence—"maybe I better go ask Aunt Julia if I and Herbert can't wash 'em. I guess I better go ask her anyhow." And without more debate she hopped up the steps and skipped into the house through the kitchen. A moment later she appeared in the open doorway of a room upstairs.

It was a pretty room, vaguely scented with pink geraniums and blue lobelia and coral fuchsias that poised, urgent with color, in the hearty sunshine streaming upon the window boxes at the open windows. The forms of pale-blue birds and lavender flowers curled up and down the cretonne curtains and over the chairs and the chaise longue where on fluffily reclined, in garments of tender fabric and gentle colors, the prettiest twenty-year-old girl in that creditably supplied town.

It must be said that no stranger would have been apt to take Florence for her niece—though everybody admitted that Florence's hair was pretty. ("I'll say that for her," was the family way of putting it.) Florence did not care for her hair herself; it was dark and thick and long, like her Aunt Julia's; but Florence—except in the realistic presence of a mirror—preferred to think of herself as an ashen blonde and also as about a foot taller than she was. Persistence kept this picture of herself habitually in her mind, which, of course, helps to account for her feeling that she was justified in wearing that manner of derisive superciliousness deplored by her mother. More middle-aged gentlemen than are suspected believe that they look like the waspen youths in the magazine advertisements of ready-made clothes—and it is this very impression of theirs which accounts (as with Florence) for much that is seemingly inexplicable in their behavior.

Florence's Aunt Julia was reading an exquisitely made little book which bore her initials stamped in gold upon the cover, and it had evidently reached her by a recent delivery of the mail, for wrappings bearing canceled stamps lay upon the floor beside the chaise longue. It was a special sort of book, since its interior was not printed, but all most laboriously written with pen and ink—poems, in truth, containing probably more references to a lady named Julia than have appeared in any other poems since Herrick's. So warmly interested in the reading as to be rather pink, though not always with entire approval, this Julia, nevertheless, at the sound of footsteps, closed the book and placed it beneath one of the cushions which assisted the chaise longue to make her position a comfortable one. Her greeting was not enthusiastic.

"What do you want, Florence?"

"I was going to ask you if Herbert and me—I mean: Was it Newland Sanders gave you Fifi and Mimi, Aunt Julia?"

A look of weariness became plainly visible upon Miss Julia Atwater's charming face. "I do wish you'd hurry and grow up, Florence," she said.

"I do, too! What for, Aunt Julia?"

"So there'd be somebody else in the family at an eligible age. I really think it's an outrageous position to be in," Julia continued with languid vehemence—"to be the only girl between thirteen and forty-one in a large connection of near relatives, including children, who all seem to think they haven't anything else to think of but Who comes to see her, and Who sends her flowers and things, and Who came to see her yesterday, and Who was here the day before, and Who's coming to-morrow—and Who's she going to marry! You really ought to grow up and help me out, because I'm getting tired of it. Yes, Mr. Sanders sent me Fifi and Mimi—and I want you to keep away from 'em!"

"Why?" asked Florence.

"Because they're very rare cats, and you aren't ordinarily a very careful sort of person, Florence, if you don't mind my saying so. Besides, if I let you go near them, the next thing Herbert would be over here mussing around, and he can't go near anything without ruining it! It's just in him; he can't help it."

Florence looked thoughtful for a brief moment; then she asked: "Did Newland Sanders send 'em with the names already to them?"

"No," said Julia, emphasizing the patience of her tone somewhat. "I named them after they got here. Mr. Sanders hasn't seen them yet. He had them shipped to me. He's coming this evening. Anything more to-day, Florence?"

"Well, I was thinking," said Florence. "What do you think grandpa'll think about these cats?"

"I don't believe there'll be any more outrages," Julia returned, and her dark eyes showed a moment's animation. "I told him at breakfast that the Reign of Terror was ended, and he and everybody else had to keep away from Fifi and Mimi. Is that about all, Florence?"

"You let Kitty Silver go near 'em

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